

FITNESS

Keeping Kids Active: Ideas for Parents

Children seem to become more sedentary every year, watching television and playing video games instead of biking to the playground or playing kickball in the backyard with their pals.

Kids need regular exercise to build strong bones and muscles. Exercise also helps children sleep well at night and stay alert during the day. Such habits established in childhood help adolescents maintain healthy weight despite the hormonal changes, rapid growth and social influences that often lead to overeating. It is important to remember that active children are more likely to become fit adults.

As childhood has become more sedentary, children have put on weight — lots of it. In the past 30 years, the rate of childhood obesity has more than tripled, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of children with type 2 diabetes, a disease once limited to sedentary, overweight adults.

Set A Good Example

If you want an active child, be active yourself. Take the stairs instead of the elevator and park the car farther away from stores. Never make exercise seem like a punishment or a chore. Find fun activities that the whole family can do together such as:

- Swimming
- Nature hikes
- Cycling
- Canoeing
- Walks with the family dog

Limit Screen Time

Watching television is directly related to childhood obesity. Children who watch more than five hours of television a day are eight times more likely to be obese than are children who watch less than two hours of television a day. A surefire way to increase your children's activity levels is to limit the number of hours they're allowed to watch television each day. Other sedentary activities such as playing video and computer games or talking on the phone should also be limited.

Promote Activity – Not Exercise

Many noncompetitive activities are available for a child who isn't interested in organized athletics. The key is to find things that your child likes to do.

Start Young

Remember your energetic toddler? Direct that energy into a lifelong love of physical activity. For instance, have your child show you how bunnies hop, eagles fly or dogs wag their tails.

For tips on how to help children become more active, visit <http://weboflife.ksc.nasa.gov>

